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Special and Partial Report of the
JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
AND LIVESTOCK PROBLEMS

THE RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT OF FARM LABORERS IN CALIFORNIA 1950

*(With Special Consideration and Recommendations Concerning
Proposals for Extension of Unemployment Insurance)*

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IMPORTED FARM LABOR

The Secretary of Labor of the United States has stated that agriculture nationally should expect a labor shortage totaling 400,000. In order to meet this shortage, it is expected that many thousands of domestic workers not now in industry or agriculture may be induced to accept employment. However, the great bulk of the shortage will have to be met through the importation of foreign workers. Sources of supply of such foreign labor are the Hawaiian Islands, Mexico, British West Indies, Central America, and Canada. For all practical purposes, California must rely upon Mexican nationals and Filipino workers available in the Hawaiian Islands. Recent surveys by the Department of Employment indicate that 5,000 to 6,000 Filipino workers might be recruited from Hawaii. Generally speaking, California agriculture prefers Mexican nationals because of its historical experience and association with them. During World War II California was allotted approximately 50 percent of all Mexican importations. If such a formula is followed in 1951 and California's farm labor shortage is met with Mexican importations, it will require an available supply of at least 75,000 to assure the harvest of California's crops.

of nonagricultural jobs, which the workers expected to develop in California and elsewhere. Although immigration for farm work was slow, both from California metropolitan areas and from other states, many workers with farm backgrounds were arriving in the World War II centers of war production—in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and elsewhere. Some of these, as their funds were exhausted, showed a temporary interest in nearby farm jobs.

Mexican Nationals

More Mexican nationals were contracted in 1950 than in 1949. The Immigration and Naturalization Service was active in apprehending and deporting Mexicans illegally in California, withdrawing many from the farm work force. To retain these workers in hard-to-fill jobs, the California Department of Employment and the United States Employment Service certified to the need so that some illegal workers could be contracted. Recruitment of Mexicans across the border was at a standstill and it was the contracting of workers illegally in the work force that accounted for the increase in the number of foreign contract workers during the year.

The following table shows the number of Mexican nationals under contract in California for the years 1948 through 1950:

Mexican Nationals Under Contract in California

	1950	1949	1948
January -----	8,000	7,000	7,800
February -----	8,700	6,500	7,600
March -----	8,000	5,300	7,600
April -----	7,000	5,800	6,500
May -----	6,600	4,500	6,300
June -----	5,700	3,800	8,500
July -----	6,000	3,500	8,500
August -----	6,200	3,300	7,500
September -----	7,700	3,100	7,500
October -----	7,800	4,000	10,300
November -----	7,900	4,000	8,000
December -----	10,100	7,500	7,300

Other Workers

There was virtually no increase in the employment of displaced persons during the year. A few individuals and families arrived and located on farms through private arrangements. Some displaced persons, who had arrived in 1949, left farm work in 1950 to enter other employment.

As concern about the 1951 labor supply increased during the latter part of 1950, consideration was given to importing Filipino workers from Hawaii, where possibly 5,000 to 6,000 might be available for work on the mainland. There was a tentative plan to utilize this labor source in 1951, although arrangements were not complete at the end of the year.

Farm Wage Rates

Early in 1950 some wage rates were below 1949 levels. By the end of the year, with a diminishing labor supply and increasing competition in the labor market, wages increased, reaching or exceeding 1949 levels for some farm work.

In general, outside of Imperial Valley, there is less variation in the seasonal labor needs of Southern California than in those of other areas of the State. This is partly because of the supplementary seasons of navel and Valencia oranges (navel oranges are picked between January and May, and the Valencia orange harvest extends from May to November) and partly because of more or less year-round activity in lemon picking and miscellaneous vegetable operations. Vegetable production required a minimum of about 10,000 workers throughout the year 1949, with a peak in early spring of about 15,000. The picking of oranges and lemons combined required a work force varying from about 5,000 in late November and December to between 13,000 and 15,000 during the April peak of lemons and navel oranges, and approximately the same peak numbers during the late July and August peak of Valencia orange picking.

In 1949 farm employment in Southern California varied from a low of 98,000 on January 15th to a high of 121,000 on October 1st. The fall harvest peak was caused primarily by the overlapping of the walnut and tomato harvests with the citrus and miscellaneous vegetable activities.

The make-up of the Southern California farm work force at the low point of the year, January 15, 1949, and the peak, October 1, 1949, was estimated as follows:

Type of worker	Number working	
	January 15	October 1
Total	98,000	121,000
Farmers and unpaid family workers	41,500	42,000
Hired year-round workers	29,500	32,000
Hired temporary workers:		
Local	15,000	33,500
Nonlocal	12,000	13,500
(Mexican nationals included)	(6,200)	(3,700)

The Mexican nationals included in the nonlocal estimates were employed on contracts. At the peak, women represented 11 percent of the farm work force and boys and girls under 18 years represented 5 percent. About 2,800 women and children were included in the nonlocals, accounting for about 20 percent of this group.

Southern California seems to be an area of relatively stable employment possibilities in comparison with other areas of the State. However, local needs within the area vary considerably in seasons, numbers, and types of workers required. There are also established patterns of employment whereby workers who are engaged in this area during the spring migrate northward as soon as activity increases there, although the total labor demand actually continues to increase in Southern California also. It is usual for some labor stringencies to develop during the summer, particularly in the citrus areas. Because citrus picking and vegetable stoop labor jobs have experienced the greatest difficulty in attracting suitable and willing domestic farm workers, and because of the proximity of Southern California to the Mexican border, more Mexican nationals have been contracted for use in this area than in any other part of the State. There are also more Mexican citizens believed to be working illegally in this area than elsewhere in the State.

Many persons residing in rural or metropolitan areas of Southern California become migrant workers in other parts of the State during some seasons. Probably the greatest number work in the San Joaquin

Valley, although many pick fruit in the Central and North Coast and Sacramento Valley counties. Unemployment in Southern California is noticeably affected by the presence or absence of job opportunities in these other areas.

B. *Central and North Coast* agricultural areas extend from San Luis Obispo County northward to the Oregon border, with the major crop production centering in the Salinas Valley of Monterey County—a noted vegetable area; in the Santa Clara, Livermore, and San Ramon valleys near San Jose and Oakland—important apricot, prune, pear, and vegetable areas; and in Sonoma, Lake, Napa, and Mendocino counties north of San Francisco Bay, where prunes, pears, wine grapes, apples, and hops are the principal crops. Sonoma County is the leading poultry center of the United States, as well as an important dairy area.

There is wide variation in the temporary farm labor needs of some counties in this area, which means that many migrant workers are used—the number varied from 3,000 to 27,000 for the area during 1949. Many of these workers came from the San Francisco Bay area, but many also came from Southern California, the San Joaquin Valley, and from other states. In addition, there are large numbers of local workers, particularly in San Jose, who migrate to other areas—especially the San Joaquin Valley—for work after the completion of local crop harvests.

During 1949 the total farm work force in the Central and North Coast area varied from a low of 64,000 on February 15th to a high of 113,000 on August 25th. A secondary peak, with employment approaching 100,000, occurred during July, when the large apricot harvest overlapped other crops. The late August peak was caused by the overlapping major harvests of hops, pears, apples, and prunes. Vegetable production is heavy in the Central Coast area during most of the year, requiring from a minimum of 4,000 to a maximum of about 12,000 workers. Many workers in Imperial Valley vegetables during the winter and early spring migrate to Monterey County for vegetable work the balance of the year.

The make-up of the Central and North Coast farm work force at the low point of the year, February 15, 1949, and the peak, August 25th, was estimated as follows:

Type of worker	Number working	
	February 15	August 25
Total	64,000	113,000
Farmers and unpaid family workers	32,000	35,000
Hired year-round workers	21,800	23,000
Hired temporary workers:		
Local	7,200	28,000
Nonlocal	3,000	27,000
(Mexican nationals included)	(300)	(250)

At the peak women represented 12 percent of the total farm work force and boys and girls under 18 years represented 20 percent. About 13,500 women and children were included in the nonlocals, accounting for about 50 percent of this group.

C. *San Joaquin Valley* includes a stretch of highly productive farm land, about 250 miles long and 50 miles wide, extending from the Tehachapi Mountains northward through the center of the State to the delta lands near the joining of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers. The

western states spend some time in the San Joaquin Valley. Because cotton picking is one of the largest and latest seasonal activities in the State—or on the Pacific Coast—cotton picking is frequently the last job of the season for many workers. The valley is climatically favorable during the winter and is traditionally a favored spot for “wintering” by many idle workers. A contributing factor has been the existence of considerable housing. Accordingly, unemployment tends to be high between the end of cotton picking early in the year and the beginning of spring activities in late March or April.

The make-up of the San Joaquin Valley work force at the low point of the year, March 15, 1949, and the peak, October 15, 1949, was estimated as follows:

<i>Type of worker</i>	<i>Number working</i>	
	<i>March 15</i>	<i>October 15</i>
Total	118,000	257,000
Farmers and unpaid family workers.....	53,500	56,000
Hired year-round workers.....	39,000	42,000
Hired temporary workers:		
Local	21,000	83,600
Nonlocal	4,500	75,400

No Mexican nationals were working under contract in this area in 1949. The peak work force included 36,200 women, or 14 percent of the total, and 18,600 boys and girls under 18 years, who represented 7 percent of the total. About 23,100 women and children were included in the nonlocal workers, accounting for more than 30 percent of this group.

D. *Sacramento Valley and Northeast area* includes that central part of the State extending from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta northward to the Oregon border and into the foothills and mountain valleys near the Nevada border. Although the labor requirements of this area are less than in the other three California areas, it is an important agricultural district and there is wide variation in the temporary farm labor needs. Many migrant workers are used—the number varying from 1,500 to 17,000 during 1949. The large peach, almond, prune, pear, plum and olive harvests attract migrants, not only from other California points, but also from other states—particularly Oregon and Washington. In addition to the tree fruit and nuts, this area has about 1½ million acres of field crops, principally hay and grain, but also large acreages of rice, sugar beets and beans. Accordingly, the area uses many operators of mechanized field harvest equipment. There is considerable vegetable production in the lower end of the valley near Sacramento, including tomatoes, asparagus and peas. These crops, together with other vegetables and the sugar beets, use considerable stoop labor. At the northern end of the State, in the Tulalake area, there is a sizeable fall potato crop which uses roughly 1,000 migrants each year. Aside from the migrant and local families who work in the fruit, nuts, and tomatoes, the Sacramento Valley is highly dependent upon a labor supply of single men of two types—the skilled equipment operators and the stoop laborers.

The make-up of the farm work force of this northern area at the low point of the year, March 15, 1949, and the peak, September 10, 1949, was estimated as follows:

Type of worker	Number working	
	March 15	September 10
Total	35,000	75,000
Farmers and unpaid family workers	22,000	27,500
Hired year-round workers	7,000	9,500
Hired temporary workers:		
Local	4,500	21,000
Nonlocal	1,500	17,000

About 60 Mexican nationals were on contract and included in the nonlocal estimates for March; however, only a few of these remained by the latter part of the year. At the peak women represented about 12 percent of the farm work force, and boys and girls under 18 years represented 8 percent. Included in the nonlocals at peak were 4,600 women and children, accounting for 27 percent of this group.

III. Agricultural Unemployment in California

Farm labor unemployment is extremely difficult to estimate because of the complicated agricultural and related employment patterns, the continual movement of workers into and out of California, and the shifting into and out of the labor market by local seasonal agricultural and nonagricultural workers. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between persons who are not in the labor market and those who would be in the labor market if they had reason to think that suitable work was available. Some workers who become unemployed upon the completion of a "season" leave the farm labor market. Others do not actively seek farm work because they know that the "season" is over and such a search would be futile. In general, estimates of unemployment include persons normally in the farm labor market but for whom there is no suitable work.

Another difficulty in estimating unemployment is to attempt to distinguish between agricultural and nonagricultural unemployment. Where should unemployed persons be classified when their work experience has included both agricultural and nonagricultural jobs? For example, an unemployed carpenter may take a job fruit picking out of necessity. When the fruit picking job is complete, is he an unemployed carpenter or an unemployed fruit picker? Even though a farm job is frequently the last work opportunity open to some persons who have normally been employed in nonagricultural jobs, there is a tendency to classify these persons as agricultural unemployed at the end of a "season." A large number of former nonagricultural workers have sought farm work in recent years, creating a general oversupply of farm labor. Some observers believe that resulting high estimates of unemployment of farm workers have reflected on the agricultural industry, when the unemployment should more accurately have been described as a general problem caused by population and labor force growth more rapid than the growth in job opportunities.

Despite these difficulties, rough estimates of agricultural unemployment for the years 1948, 1949, and 1950 were 70,000 and